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Praying for Our Leaders

by Mark Caleb Smith

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Tim. 2:1–3).

The place is really quite remarkable. Nestled on a leafy street lined with brick sidewalks, Capitol Hill Baptist Church (CHBC) is a different sort of monument, especially when compared to Washington, D.C.’s other landmarks. Mark Dever, the pastor, serves a congregation of political animals in perhaps the world’s most political city. Though politics is rarely a clear theme at CHBC, prayer is. The prayers are long, read, and rich. Periodically, Dever and others pray for our leaders, from the President of the United States to the District’s Mayor. Most strikingly, the prayers are devoid of rancor and division, for they petition God not for political victory, but for His wisdom and blessing to be poured onto our leaders as they fulfill their duties. The juxtaposition between the church’s solemnity and the city that surrounds it is striking and captivating, and it is never so stark as when the body of Christ calls on God. Through these prayers, CHBC fulfills God’s commands.

Paul’s exhortation to Timothy, printed above, is familiar, perhaps overly so. Paul calls on Timothy not only to pray, but to do so properly. An intercession is to intervene on behalf of another, and a supplication is to pray humbly and earnestly. How we pray for our leaders can be as important as what we pray for as we approach God. To pray humbly for another takes the focus off the one who prays and places the other’s needs before God’s throne. To pray earnestly is to pray sincerely — without guile, mixed motives, or hidden agendas.

Too frequently, we think of prayer as a laundry list of demands for God, but when

we do so, we miss one of its primary purposes. If we take this passage to heart, we find that prayer is not only for God to consider our requests, but so that we might be transformed through the act of prayer. If we are to avoid the hypocrisy of appearing one way before God, but thinking and acting differently around others, then how we pray should reflect how we live, ponder, and speak. Consider the implications for not only how we pray for leaders, but for how we should treat them and talk about them with others.

Attitudes such as humility, sincerity, and earnestness are bluntly at odds with our culture and its approach to leaders and their authority. When we think of our leaders, be they elected officials, pastors, or our bosses, we rarely consider or speak about them through these attributes. We are far more likely to be angry, cynical, jealous, or opportunistic. Our politics are marked by hostility. Our social media interactions are far from sincere and earnest. Think of our witness if we carry these qualities into our daily lives at church, in the home, on the job, or in our classrooms. Perhaps this is what Paul means when he encourages us to do these things so that “we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.”

So, we pray for our leaders because we are commanded to do so; not only for their wisdom and godliness, but so we might portray those prayers as we reflect Christ to those around us.



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